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DE RUEHJA #1259/01 2091042
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2927
INFO RUCNARF/ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 001259

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, EAP/RSP, DRL
NSC FOR J. BADER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KWMN](#) [ID](#)
SUBJECT: USG-FUNDED TRAINING EMPOWERS NEW WOMEN LEGISLATORS

REF: A. JAKARTA 1092

[B.](#) JAKARTA 851

[¶](#)1. (U) SUMMARY: U.S.-funded training is playing a key role in building up the legislative capacity of the Indonesian Parliament (DPR). More than sixty percent of the DPR which will sit in October will consist of new members. Between 15 to 18 percent of the new legislators will be women, an increase from the 2004 figure of 11 percent. A USG-funded workshop held July 21-24 focused on empowering these recently-elected women legislators. Similar training programs are in the works for other soon-to-be MPs. END SUMMARY.

ASSISTING NEW WOMEN LEGISLATORS

[¶](#)2. (U) U.S. government-supported National Democratic Institute (NDI) and International Republican Institute (IRI) programs are providing essential political skills training for new Indonesian legislators at the national and local levels. Poloff observed a July 21-24 workshop sponsored by NDI. The workshop focused on empowering new women legislators. This was likely the most extensive training the generally inexperienced soon-to-be legislators will receive. The DPR currently only offers them a short orientation program.

[¶](#)3. (U) In the sessions, a total of 28 women from parties across the political spectrum, many wearing the traditional Muslim headscarf, enthusiastically participated in the training. Participants were from throughout the country, from Papua to Aceh to the far-flung islands of Jambi and Maluku. Their trainers included one female MP from Malaysia (a USG International Visitors Leadership Program awardee) and one from Australia, who joined two Indonesian media consultants on a pro-bono basis to lead the sessions.

NETWORKING AND OTHER STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

[¶](#)4. (U) The sessions provided an important opportunity for women legislators to network across party lines and identify partners for future consensus building on key legislation. They met with the current leader of the DPR women's caucus and learned about women friendly networking resources such as the "Iknowpolitics" website and blogs. Trainers discussed how to choose which of the eleven commissions to join and encouraged them to also consider Commission One (one of the most influential, dealing with foreign affairs and defense) as well as other powerful commissions such as those dealing with finance and other economic issues.

[¶](#)5. (U) Trainers asked the parliamentarians to brainstorm strategies for success in their first one hundred days in office. The parliamentarians' ideas included: "contacting constituents on Facebook; holding gratitude gatherings;

newsletters; conducting surveys to hear about constituent concerns; building health clinics; contacting religious communities for outreach; asking youth organizations to create educational programs for women; and, consolidating networks within local government bodies."

¶6. (U) Trainers also helped the legislators identify and practice a variety of essential skills. Legislators polished their public speaking skills and learned how to address the media. They also discussed the importance of constituency outreach, honoring codes of ethics, and the impact of gender on legislative products.

THE POLITICS OF WOMEN'S LEGISLATIVE PARTICIPATION

¶7. (U) The legislative participation of women became a heated political issue during the lead up to the April 9, 2009, legislative elections (see reftels). A 2008 election law contained an affirmative action clause aimed at boosting the numbers of women in Parliament to thirty percent of the total. The law also stipulated that all political parties must include a woman candidate as one of every three candidates on the party list of candidates. This was meant to correct the fact that women candidates, who often had less money and influence, were frequently relegated to the bottom of party lists, making it nearly impossible for them to gain seats (which parties allocated from the top of the list down).

¶8. (U) A Constitutional Court ruling a few months before the elections dramatically changed the situation. The ruling enabled voters to choose the candidate on the list who they

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preferred, regardless of their position on the party list. Women's activists were concerned that this ruling effectively eliminating the affirmative action clause would be disadvantageous to women. The percentage of women in the 2009 legislature nonetheless increased. Pending final seat allocation, preliminary results indicate that women will comprise between 15 to 18 percent of the DPR.

¶9. (U) Indonesian women are making progress in the field of politics. The legislators' enthusiasm and appreciation of the NDI program was clear and the event generated considerable goodwill toward the U.S. Similar training programs are in the works for other soon-to-be MPs.

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